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ABSTRACT

During the 1976 academic year the Evaluation Office continued its study of student development at Simon's Rock and of the factors that underlie successful academic and social adjustment at an early college. Included in the year's study are the characteristics of 1976 incoming students, compared with students entering in previous years, predictors of course grades and grade-point average in the first or transition year, predictors of extracurricular activity and judicial action, student contact with the health service, correlates of student attrition, interviews with graduating students, and student development and change during the time spent at the college. (Author/MSE)

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PROGRESS REPORT

OFFICE OF EVALUATION

MARCH, 1977

During the 1976 academic year, the Evaluation Office has continued its study of student development at Simon's Rock and of the factors that underlie successful academic and social adjustment at an early college. One of the current foci for evaluation has been a closer examination of the Transition, or first, Year at Simon's Rock, particularly admissions criteria, academic performance, social adjustment, student health, and drop-out, suspension, and transfer patterns. We are also continuing to assess characteristics of incoming students compared with college freshmen elsewhere and to conduct exit interviews with graduating students about life and career plans. Details and preliminary findings from these studies follow.

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Characteristics of 1976 Incoming Students. Results indicate a slight shift in the intellectual profile of incoming students compared to past Simon's Rock students. Verbal ability is somewhat higher than usual though critical thinking ability is lower (at the 51st percentile of college freshmen norms compared to our usual near 60th percentile). The drop in critical thinking scores is due to a drop in the percentage of students scoring in the top quartile of this test. This particular measure is highly related to the choice of and performance in science programs and, although interest in the science majors at Simon's Rock does not appear to have diminished, there are some indications from science

faculty that performance and course grades are lower than usual. Further comments about the predictors of course grades will be made in a later section. High school equivalency testing (GED) indicated a slight but insignificant drop in the Simon's Rock average compared to past years (from 72% to 67%). All 1976 students passed the equivalency exam, however. The noted change in intellectual profile may also be a function of the unusually large numbers of students interested in the fine arts and music programs this year. Some shifts in psychological maturity (ego developmental level) were found in the 1976 incoming class. As was true in 1975, the large majority of new students (almost 80%) were classified as being at the conformist stage of development in Loevinger's terms or just beginning the transition to the post-conformist stage. This marked homogeneity in developmental stage of new students has been widely discussed at Simon's Rock this year because of its relevance for academic and social planning. The greatest change in this year's student body was the large drop in the numbers of female students categorized as being at the "very mature" end of the developmental continuum (from approximately 30% in past years to 8% this year). Reasons for this shift are unclear but are being discussed in meetings with the Admissions staff.

Student Profile Over the Past Four Years. Since Admissions and other offices are interested in a Simon's Rock student profile, the Evaluation Office has begun to compile data based on the last four years of academic and psychological assessment and the American Council of Education's survey of college freshmen in which we annually participate. The findings from the Evaluation Office

test battery given at the beginning of each year to incoming students have been detailed in past progress reports and the preceding section. To summarize, Simon's Rock students are generally above average in academic ability though somewhat less advanced psychologically than their 18 year old college freshmen counterparts at traditional colleges. It is in the areas of academic aspirations, family educational background, and self-concept that the Simon's Rock student is most distinctly different from other college freshmen, even at similar private four-year liberal arts colleges. Our students are unusually ambitious academically with some 75-80% planning to obtain professional or graduate degrees (in comparison with the 25% national average). They are self-confident, pride themselves in their intellectual and creative abilities, and expect to make important contributions in their fields. They are altruistic, interested in social issues, and not very interested in business and making money. The parents of Simon's Rock students are highly educated with a much larger proportion of both mothers and fathers holding graduate degrees than is true in other colleges (Simon's Rock: 50% of the fathers and 28% of the mothers compared with the private liberal college average of 25% of the fathers and 9% of the mothers).

Predictors of Course Grades and Grade Point Average in the Transition Year. The Watson-Glaser measure of critical thinking ability continues to be the best over-all predictor of academic performance at Simon's Rock, even over such other measures such as the Verbal and Math SAT scores, analytic ability (field

independence), and verbal ability (ETS vocabulary test). Studies undertaken in 1974 and 1976 indicate that critical thinking ability is significantly related to grades in many of the Transition Year courses, particularly in the social sciences and sciences (correlations ranging from .40 to .85). Critical thinking (CT) is also the score which best predicts first semester grade point average. This point is dramatically illustrated by the CT scores of students ending up on academic probation their first fall semester (1974: CT percentile for AcPro students was 28% compared with class average at 57%; 1975 AcPro percentile was 27% compared with class average at 62%; 1976: AcPro percentile was 35% compared with class average at 51%). The significance of critical thinking ability for understanding academic staying power at Simon's Rock is further illustrated by the analysis of the scores of freshmen students returning to vs. leaving Simon's Rock after the 1975 academic year.

	Critical Thinking Average percentile rank (College Freshmen Norms)
BA Students	82%ile
AA Students	77% "
Returning: Program Undecided	58% "
Drop-out or Suspension	30% "
Transfer to other college	80% "

Given the consistency of these findings, Simon's Rock Admissions Office has begun to include the CT test as part of its admissions assessment, particularly when the academic ability of the applicant is in question. An even more intensive study of admissions criteria and the follow-up of admitted students is under way in cooperation with the newly formed faculty-administrative Admissions Committee.

Predictors of Extracurricular Activity and Judicial Action. In addition to our interest in how students cope with their academic responsibilities, we are also interested in how 16 year olds react and adjust to non-academic college life and dormitory living. We have found that there are large and significant differences in behavior the first year on campus that distinguish students at either end of ego developmental continuum (Pre-Conformists versus Post-Conformists), with the Conformist group falling somewhere between the two. We now have analyzed the data from 1972 to 1976 and the following have been consistent findings from year to year. The students classified as Post-Conformist by the Evaluation Office tend to be rated as mature models playing leadership roles on campus, that is, involved in extracurricular activities and community governance whereas the least mature Pre-Conformist students have been rated as acting as catalysts for partying and as probably engaged in activity that would warrant judicial action. Judicial records indicate that the least mature students (Pre-Conformists) are more apt to be called before Judicial and tend to receive the most severe penalities such as probation or suspension. However, it should be noted that the least mature students do not necessarily continue to be disciplinary problems since a spurt in psychological development is particularly marked for the least mature students for Year 1 to Year 2 so that by the second year these students (at least the ones who return to school) have "caught up with" their peers.

Student Contact with the Health Service. We are in the process of analyzing data on the frequency and nature of student contact with

the College Health Service. We are interested in trying to identify factors which differentiate between students who come to the service with primarily medical versus primarily psychological complaints. Data from a similar Evaluation study in 1974 suggested that students who are developmentally out of phase with their peers (that is, the very immature or very mature 16 year old) may have adjustment problems that become manifest as medical or psychological symptoms. The Health Service, upon the request of the Evaluation Office, is currently tabulating information on a random sample of students who entered Simon's ROck in 1975 and 1976. Data will be analyzed by groups in order to maintain confidentiality of individual students.

Correlates of Students Attrition. We have just begun a more systematic investigation of students who left Simon's Rock during or after the first year on campus, beginning with the class of 1973. A recent study by Admissions has indicated that major attrition occurs after the first year at Simon's ROck. The Evaluation Office plans to look for developmental and/or intellectual ability factors which may differentiate the students who return after their first year from those who transfer elsewhere or who drop-out or are suspended.

Interviews with Graduating Students. As part of the on-going follow-up study of graduates, in the spring of 1976 we began to interview graduating BA students concerning their future educational and vocational plans, their feelings about Simon's ROck and the education they received here, and their sense of identity and competence. (A sample interview is included in the Appendix.) After the interview, students take the Loevinger test of ego developmental stage. Since most graduating students have taken this test at least once upon

entrance into Simon's Rock, the second testing allows us to look at developmental change as a function of time at Simon's Rock. (See following section for results.) The graduate exit interviews will be given each year in the late winter and spring terms.

Student Development and Change. One of the most important issues for evaluation is the nature and degree of intellectual and psychological growth that occurs during a student's tenure at Simon's Rock. Results from the 1975 CLEP testing, which establishes sophomore standing, show that our second year students are above average, scoring at the 58th percentile on national norms. The 1976 sophomores will be taking the CLEP exams in late March. The 1975 class of seven graduating seniors all passed their comprehensive and oral exams and were certified as doing at least C level work by the external examiners. The twelve 1976 seniors are currently working on their theses and have not yet taken their qualifying exams. Approximately half the twelve students have taken either the GRE or MEDCAT exams but have not yet received their scores.

At the end of the 1975 academic year, we completed a study on the degree of change in psychological maturity during the years at Simon's Rock. Thirty-eight 1974 students were assessed for developmental stage change after one year at Simon's Rock; thirteen 1973 students were assessed for change after two years at Simon's Rock. Based on information from other sources where ego development in college students is being studied, one can conclude that change in the early college years at Simon's Rock is very comparable to, if not more rapid than change at other colleges. Particularly

dramatic are the shifts from the lowest to mid-levels of maturity, indicating that, even after one year, developmentally lower stage students catch up with their cohorts, making the Simon's Rock 16-17 year olds far more comparable to the 18-19 year old students elsewhere. Although we tend to get more immature students at entrance than most colleges, there is no indication that our students lag behind. Of the seven 1975 seniors, five were tracked by the Evaluation Office across their four years at the college and were assessed for developmental stage at the end of their senior year. All five were judged to have moved from one of the lower or mid-stages of ego development to one of the higher stages. No information is available yet on the 1976 senior class.